

What is claimed is:

1. A dialog facilitator preserving the spatial and temporal context of a dialog composed of a plurality of postings in an electronic messaging system, the postings being packaged into messages which are sent and received using a messaging system, said dialog facilitator comprising:

5 a services gateway exchanging messages with the messaging system, and using information contained in the messages to populate a dialog posting and a posting summary;

said dialog posting containing a posting identifier uniquely identifying the dialog posting, a dialog identifier identifying the dialog to which the dialog posting corresponds, and posting detail information;

10 said posting summary containing addressing information identifying recipients of the corresponding dialog posting, the posting identifier, the dialog identifier, referential information defining the relationship of the posting summary to other posting summaries in the dialog, and content description information;

a content store for storing at least one said dialog posting;

15 a dialog store for altering a posting summary of said at least one dialog posting, a journal keeper coupled to said dialog store for examining said referential information to determine whether said dialog summary relates to an existing said posting summary in said dialog store, and assigning a unique dialog identifier to said posting summary if it is not related to an existing said posting summary in said dialog store; and

a media coordinator using the posting identifier, the dialog identifier, and the referential information to present the spatial and temporal context of a selected dialog posting in relation to other said postings belonging to a given dialog.

2. The dialog facilitator according to claim 1, wherein:

said journal keeper updates said referential information of said related posting summaries to reference said posting summary, and stores said updated referential information in said dialog store.

3. The dialog facilitator according to claim 1, wherein:

said media coordinator enables a user to navigate between postings belonging to a given dialog, displays the content description information of selected posting summaries, and selectively retrieves one said dialog posting responsive to a user command and displays said
5 posting detail information.

4. The dialog facilitator according to claim 1, wherein:

said media coordinator includes an interface for composing said dialog posting, said interface prompting the user to specify whether said given posting is a contribution to an existing dialog or initiates a new dialog; and

5 if said given posting is a contribution to an existing dialog, said interface defaulting the dialog identifier of the posting to the dialog identifier of the existing dialog, and defaulting the referential information of the posting to point to the posting within the existing dialog to which said given posting is addressing.

5. The dialog facilitator according to claim 4, wherein:

said interface enables a user to specify referential information identifying at least one specific portion of at least one selected posting to which said given posting is addressing.

6. The dialog facilitator according to claim 4, wherein said interface enables a user to specify intent information.

7. The dialog facilitator according to claim 4, wherein:

said journal keeper maintains a list of participants for each dialog;

said interface prompts the user to provide a list of recipients for said given posting; and

if said given posting is a contribution to an existing dialog, said interface defaults said list

5 of recipients as said list of participants of the dialog to which said given posting is related.

8. The dialog facilitator according to claim 7, wherein:

said interface enables the user to add additional recipients to the list of recipients, thereby causing the media coordinator to send the posting to the additional recipients and add the additional recipients to the list of participants.

9. The dialog facilitator according to claim 1, wherein:

said media coordinator graphically depicts the spatial and temporal context of a selected dialog posting using a branch structure illustrating how all postings in a given dialog are related to the initial posting either directly or through another posting; and

5 a dialog path consists of a continuous sequence of dialog postings including an initial posting of the dialog which are related to one another.

10. The dialog facilitator according to claim 7, wherein:

said media coordinator enables the user to forward a selection selected from the group comprising (a posting, a dialog path, and a dialog) by specifying the selection and a list of recipients.

11. A dialog facilitator on a host computer, the dialog facilitator preserving the spatial and temporal context of postings within a dialog, the postings being packaged into messages having extended header information which are sent and received using an email client, said dialog facilitator comprising:

5 a services gateway retrieving an email message from the email client, and using information contained in the email messages to populate a dialog posting containing a posting identifier uniquely identifying the dialog posting, and posting detail information;

said services gateway using information contained in the email messages to populate a posting summary corresponding to said posting and containing said posting identifier, content
10 description information, and referential information identifying a relationship between said posting and another said posting;

a journal keeper receiving said posting summary from said services gateway and storing said posting summary in a dialog store residing on the host computer;

said journal keeper examining said referential information to determine whether said
15 dialog summary relates to another said posting summary in said dialog store;

said journal keeper assigning a unique dialog identifier to said posting summary if it is not related to another said posting summary in said dialog store, and assigning the dialog identifier of said related posting summary if said posting summary is related to another said posting summary;

20 said journal keeper updating said referential information of said related dialog summaries to reference said dialog summary, and storing said dialog summary in said dialog store; and

a media coordinator using the posting identifier, the dialog identifier, and the referential information to present the spatial and temporal context of a selected dialog posting in relation to other said postings belonging to a given dialog.

12. The dialog facilitator according to claim 11, wherein:

said media coordinator enables a user to navigate between postings belonging to said given dialog, displaying the content description information of selected posting summaries, and selectively retrieving a chosen said dialog posting and displaying said posting detail information.

13. The dialog facilitator according to claim 11, wherein:

said journal keeper updates said referential information of said related posting summaries to reference said posting summary, and stores said updated referential information in said dialog store.

14. The dialog facilitator according to claim 11, wherein:

said media coordinator enables a user to navigate between postings belonging to a given dialog, displays the content description information of selected posting summaries, and selectively retrieves a chosen said dialog posting and displays said posting detail information.

15. The dialog facilitator according to claim 11, wherein:

said media coordinator includes an interface for composing a given said dialog posting, said interface prompting the user to specify whether said given posting is a contribution to an existing dialog or initiates a new dialog; and

if said given posting is a contribution to an existing dialog, said interface defaulting the dialog identifier of the posting to the dialog identifier of the existing dialog, and defaulting the referential information of the posting to point to the posting within the existing dialog to which said given posting is addressing.

16. The dialog facilitator according to claim 15, wherein:

said interface enables a user to specify referential information identifying at least one specific portion of selected posting(s) to which said given posting is addressing.

17. The dialog facilitator according to claim 15, wherein:

said interface enables a user to specify intent information.

18. The dialog facilitator according to claim 15, wherein:

said journal keeper maintains a list of participants for each dialog;

said interface prompts the user to provide a list of recipients for said given posting; and

if said given posting is a contribution to an existing dialog, said interface defaults said list

5 of recipients as said list of participants of the dialog to which said given posting is related.

19. The dialog facilitator according to claim 18, wherein:

said interface enables the user to add additional recipients to the list of recipients, thereby causing the media coordinator to send the posting to the additional recipients and add the additional recipients to the list of participants.

20. The dialog facilitator according to claim 11, wherein:

said media coordinator graphically depicts the spatial and temporal context of a selected dialog posting using a branch structure illustrating how all postings in a given dialog are related to the initial posting either directly or through another posting; and

5 wherein a dialog path consists of a continuous sequence of dialog postings including an initial posting of the dialog which are related to one another.

21. The dialog facilitator according to claim 11, wherein:

said media coordinator enables the user to forward a selection selected from the group comprising (a posting, a dialog path, and a dialog) by specifying the selection and a list of recipients.

22. A dialog facilitator preserving the spatial and temporal context of a dialog composed of a plurality of postings in an electronic messaging system, the postings being

packaged into messages which are sent and received using a messaging system, said dialog facilitator comprising:

5 means for exchanging messages with the messaging system, and using information contained in the messages to populate a dialog posting and a posting summary;

said dialog posting containing a posting identifier uniquely identifying the dialog posting, a dialog identifier identifying the dialog to which the dialog posting corresponds, and posting detail information;

10 said posting summary containing addressing information identifying recipients of the corresponding dialog posting, the posting identifier, the dialog identifier, referential information defining the relationship of the posting summary to other posting summaries in the dialog, and content description information;

means for storing at least one said dialog posting;

15 means for altering a posting summary of said at least one dialog posting;

means for examining said referential information to determine whether said dialog summary relates to an existing said posting summary in said dialog store, and assigning a unique dialog identifier to said posting summary if it is not related to an existing said posting summary in said dialog store; and

20 means for presenting the spatial and temporal context of a selected dialog posting in relation to other said postings belonging to a given dialog.

23. The dialog facilitator according to claim 22, wherein:

said means for examining updates said referential information of said related posting summaries to reference said posting summary, and stores said updated referential information in said means for storing.

24. The dialog facilitator according to claim 22, wherein:

said means for presenting enables a user to navigate between postings belonging to a given dialog, displays the content description information of selected posting summaries, and selectively retrieves one said dialog posting responsive to a user command and displays said posting detail information.

25. The dialog facilitator according to claim 22, wherein:

said means for presenting includes an interface for composing said dialog posting, said interface prompting the user to specify whether said given posting is a contribution to an existing dialog or initiates a new dialog; and

if said given posting is a contribution to an existing dialog, said interface defaulting the dialog identifier of the posting to the dialog identifier of the existing dialog, and defaulting the referential information of the posting to point to the posting within the existing dialog to which said given posting is addressing.

26. The dialog facilitator according to claim 25, wherein:

said interface enables a user to specify referential information identifying at least one specific portion of at least one selected posting to which said given posting is addressing.

27. The dialog facilitator according to claim 25, wherein said interface enables a user to specify intent information.

28. The dialog facilitator according to claim 25, wherein:

said means for examining maintains a list of participants for each dialog;

said interface prompts the user to provide a list of recipients for said given posting; and

if said given posting is a contribution to an existing dialog, said interface defaults said list

5 of recipients as said list of participants of the dialog to which said given posting is related.

29. The dialog facilitator according to claim 28, wherein:

said interface enables the user to add additional recipients to the list of recipients, thereby causing the media coordinator to send the posting to the additional recipients and add the additional recipients to the list of participants.

30. The dialog facilitator according to claim 22, wherein:

said means for presenting graphically depicts the spatial and temporal context of a selected dialog posting using a branch structure illustrating how all postings in a given dialog are related to the initial posting either directly or through another posting; and

5 a dialog path consists of a continuous sequence of dialog postings including an initial posting of the dialog which are related to one another.

31. The dialog facilitator according to claim 28, wherein:

said means for presenting enables the user to forward a selection selected from the group comprising (a posting, a dialog path, and a dialog) by specifying the selection and a list of recipients.

32. A dialog facilitator on a host computer, the dialog facilitator preserving the spatial and temporal context of postings within a dialog, the postings being packaged into messages having extended header information which are sent and received using an email client, said dialog facilitator comprising:

5 means for retrieving an email message from the email client, and using information contained in the email messages to populate a dialog posting containing a posting identifier uniquely identifying the dialog posting, and posting detail information;

10 said means for retrieving using information contained in the email messages to populate a posting summary corresponding to said posting and containing said posting identifier, content description information, and referential information identifying a relationship between said posting and another said posting;

means for receiving said posting summary from said services gateway and storing said posting summary in a dialog store residing on the host computer;

15 means for receiving examining said referential information to determine whether said dialog summary relates to another said posting summary in said dialog store;

means for receiving assigning a unique dialog identifier to said posting summary if it is not related to another said posting summary in said dialog store, and assigning the dialog

identifier of said related posting summary if said posting summary is related to another said posting summary;

20 means for receiving updating said referential information of said related dialog summaries to reference said dialog summary, and storing said dialog summary in said dialog store; and

means for presenting the spatial and temporal context of a selected dialog posting in relation to other said postings belonging to a given dialog.